

Ninety years since the coup of Piłsudski

The Strategy of the Intermarium—Part 4

NATO's preparations for war with Russia

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May 12 to 14 marks the 90th anniversary of the coup by Józef Piłsudski in Poland with which the Polish bourgeoisie tried to save its rule from the threat of socialist revolution. Today, he is being idealized by large sections of the Polish bourgeoisie and the US imperialist elite.

In large measure, this is bound up with the increasing popularity of his conception of the Intermarium, a pro-imperialist alliance of right-wing nationalist regimes throughout Eastern Europe that was primarily directed against the Soviet Union. The resurgent interest in the Intermarium has been bound up with the increasing drive toward a new world war which, as the ICFI stated in its resolution “Socialism and the Fight Against War,” has been accompanied by a revival of geopolitics among the ideologists of imperialism.

This series reviews the history of the Intermarium, the main basis of which emerged in the period leading up to World War I, as a bourgeois nationalist antipode to the United Socialist States of Europe that were proposed by Leon Trotsky.

This is the final part in a four-part series. Part 1 was posted on May 31; Part 2 on June 1 and Part 3 on June 2.

The PiS-government and US war preparations against Russia

With the new right-wing government in Poland under the Law and Justice Party (PiS), the incorporation of Poland into US war plans against Russia and the realization of the Intermarium plans has reached a new level. While promoting vitriolic nationalism, Catholic bigotry and racism, the PiS government has been transforming the country into a military fulcrum that would stand at the very center of any military confrontation between NATO powers and Russia.

More so than any previous government, the current PiS government and President Andrzej Duda have put the revival of the Intermarium at the heart of their foreign policy efforts. In his inauguration address in August 2015, Duda, who maintains close ties to the head of PiS, Jarosław Kaczyński, announced that he would make the creation of an alliance among the states between the Baltic, Black and Adriatic Seas the central axis of his foreign policy. This regional bloc should eventually lead to deeper economic, political and military integration.

As has been explained above, these plans are not entirely new. However, under the government of the liberal Civic Platform (PO), these plans were put to the sidelines. While supporting a fervently anti-Russian policy, the PO government was oriented more toward an alliance with Germany. The turning point came with the coup in Ukraine in February 2014 and the

simultaneous resurgence of German militarism.

After the coup in Ukraine in February 2014, the PO government increased military spending in 2015 to reach 2 percent of the total GDP in 2016. The NATO military build-up in Eastern Europe since 2014 has turned the entire region into a dangerous hotspot and possible platform for war with Russia.

A central element of the build-up has been the Obama administration's European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) and the Readiness Action Plan, which were both announced at the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014. In 2015, US funding for the ERI totaled \$985 million. An additional \$789.3 million are requested for 2016. For 2017, the Obama administration has requested a quadrupling of ERI spending to \$3.4 billion so as to allow for a constant presence of an army brigade in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as additional exercises and positioning of combat equipment.

In a conscious provocation against Russia, the US started Operation Atlantic Resolve in 2014 with enhanced training and security cooperation with Poland, the Baltic States, Romania and Bulgaria. Since then, numerous US military units, among them the Army's 173 Airborne Brigade, 1 Cavalry Division and 3 Infantry Division, have participated in rotating deployments in Poland where they conducted joint military training and exercises with the Polish armed forces. The US is also planning to pre-position military equipment, including Abrams tanks and infantry, in Baltic and Central European countries, among them Poland.

However, the NATO build-up has fallen far short of the expectations of the Polish bourgeoisie. More significantly still, the Ukraine crisis brought to light increasing divisions within the NATO alliance, above all between the United States and Germany, which has become the dominating imperialist power in the EU. The latter, maintaining close economic and political ties with Russia, agreed to the economic sanctions against Russia in 2014, which amounted to economic warfare, but has consistently opposed the permanent stationing of NATO troops in Eastern Europe.

The German bourgeoisie remains divided over the policy toward Russia. Important sections, particularly the Social Democratic Party (SPD), have insisted, much to the dismay of Warsaw, that a “dialogue” with the Kremlin must be upheld. Moreover, some of the largest German companies have increased, rather than decreased, their cooperation with Russia. Most significantly, the German chemical company BASF has struck a multibillion-dollar deal with the Russian gas monopolist Gazprom in 2015. Its subsidiary, Wintershall, is participating in the preparation for the pipeline Nord Stream 2, which is vehemently opposed by both the United States and Poland. Leading politicians from the PiS have described the pipeline as a “threat to the national security” of Poland and a starting point for an anti-Polish, German-Russian alliance.

Just how much concern Germany's continuing ties with Russia have

provoked in Warsaw was revealed in a report that was jointly published by the Polish Defence Ministry and the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in 2015, entitled “Transatlantic Relations in a Changing European Security Environment.” In one of the essays, Andrew A. Michta pointed to the increasing divisions within the alliance over the policy toward Russia:

“Germany, the United Kingdom, and Italy won’t commit to anything beyond economic sanctions; France is vacillating; and the medium-sized and small states along NATO’s frontier like Poland and the Balts lack the punching power to move Europe to action.”

Further, he suggests that the Polish-German axis, with which the government of the Civic Platform (PO) has been mainly associated with, was in danger of disintegrating over these differences:

“The dream was that with Germany’s full backing Central Europe would finally escape its middle-periphery dilemma by simply being no one’s periphery. The Central European hedge rested on the assumption that Germany’s intra-regional relationships, especially its relationship with Poland, would offset its Russian *Ostpolitik* as a historically dominant policy vector.”

Behind the concerns over Germany’s relationship with Russia stands the more fundamental geopolitical competition between US and German imperialism. Historically, German imperialism has sought to bring Eastern Europe and the territories of the former Soviet Union under its complete control in two world wars, while fighting the United States. This fundamental conflict has been covered up since the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II, which significantly weakened the German bourgeoisie and made it dependent for a long historical period upon the support of US imperialism, not least of all in fighting the Soviet Union. However, with the re-emergence of German militarism these differences are again beginning to emerge with increasing sharpness.

This is a major reason why leading US think tanks and political analysts saw the Ukraine crisis as a confirmation of the need for a revival of the Intermarium, which has been increasingly discussed over the past five years.

Thus, Polish-American political analyst Jan Marek Chodakiewicz, who works for the Institute of World Politics, a pro-Republican graduate school for diplomats and secret service agents in Washington, argued in 2012 that the US had to focus on the Intermarium in its strategy for several reasons. The Intermarium, he argues, forms “the regional pivot and gateway to both East and West” and, in addition, is “the most stable part of the post-Soviet area (and most free and democratic).”

Therefore, Chodakiewicz advises, “the United States should focus on solidifying its influence there to use it as a springboard to handling the rest of the successor states, including the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Russian Federation itself.” [1] Warning of an alliance between Berlin and Moscow, he writes: “In essence, promoting a pro-American bloc in the middle of Europe, either to complement or counterbalance the increasingly anti-American western Europe, would be indispensable to return the US influence to the old continent.” [2]

Around the same time, the late Alexandros Petersen published a book titled *World Island: Eurasian Geopolitics and the Fate of the West*, in which he made the case for a return to the geopolitical thinking of the British imperial strategist Halford Mackinder and the integration of Piłsudski’s Intermarium policy into US strategy for the domination of Eurasia.

These conceptions have been pushed more aggressively since the US-backed coup in Ukraine in February 2014. George Friedman, the founder and former head of the private intelligence agency Stratfor, which maintains close ties to the US military and intelligence apparatus, has repeatedly underlined the need for such a strategy. In a piece entitled “From Estonia to Azerbaijan: American Strategy After Ukraine,” he outlined his strategy for US imperialism with the following words:

“Similar to the containment policy of 1945-1989, again in principle if not in detail, it would combine economy of force and finance and limit the development of Russia as a hegemonic power while exposing the United States to limited and controlled risk. The coalescence of this strategy is a development I forecast in two books, *The Next Decade* and *The Next 100 Years*, as a concept I called the Intermarium. The Intermarium was a plan pursued after World War I by Polish leader Józef Piłsudski for a federation, under Poland’s aegis, of Central and Eastern European countries. What is now emerging is not the Intermarium, but it is close. And it is now transforming from an abstract forecast to a concrete, if still emergent, reality.”

Hinting that such an alliance would be formed in addition to NATO and perhaps eventually as a substitute, he complained that NATO was not “a functional alliance” and was divided over Russia policy. Therefore, the United States should advance the military build-up of the regimes in Eastern Europe and work for them to form a military alliance:

“The Poles, Romanians, Azerbaijanis and certainly the Turks can defend themselves. They need weapons and training, and that will keep Russia contained within its cauldron as it plays out a last hand as a great power.”

Two years earlier, at the Forum for New Ideas in 2012, Friedman had already aggressively argued for a return to Piłsudski’s Intermarium strategy before a select audience of the Polish elites. Arguing that Europe was again confronted with a resurgent Germany and a possible alliance between Moscow and Berlin, he called upon Poland to take on a leadership role in Europe. Stressing that the EU lacked the capacity to protect Poland in case of a military conflict, Friedman said:

“Poland must now depend on itself. ... I will put before you a more radical idea, one that comes from General Piłsudski, the Intermarium. The Intermarium basically says: We are caught between Germany and Russia, and that stinks. ... So, we must become a very difficult morsel to swallow and we can’t become that ourselves. And he proposed the Intermarium. ... There are nations in Europe that survived simply because they were too much trouble to fight with. Poland must become too much trouble. But Poland must also form a free trade zone with countries who need Polish exports, need to be aligned with Poland, need to be led by Poland—Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, even Turkey. ... There is a moment of leadership here that Poland can undertake—in working with the United States to create a stable environment” (emphasis in the original).

Friedman’s long-time collaborator at Stratfor, Robert D. Kaplan, stressed in a piece from August 2014 titled “Piłsudski’s Europe” that “it is Poland and Romania, the two largest NATO states in northeastern and southeastern Europe respectively, that are crucial to the emergence of an effective Intermarium to counter Russia. Together they practically link the Baltic with the Black Sea.”

While the Intermarium was still far from being realized, Kaplan enthused, “a trend is discernible. High-level meetings between the Intermarium countries have intensified, as the Pentagon and State Department act as hubs for all these countries’ militaries, intelligence services and diplomatic corps to interact. Stronger US support to Eastern and Central Europe must be matched by stronger bilateral ties between the countries themselves—to say nothing of increased defence expenditures in the region.”

These discussions over foreign policy within the Polish and also the US elites preceded the ascendance to power of the government of the Law and Justice Party, which is much more closely oriented toward the US and aims to revive the Promethean project. There have been three central elements of the government’s policy over the past few months that are aimed at ensuring the close integration into US war plans.

First, the PiS government has dramatically stepped up the build-up of the country’s armed forces. It has lent enthusiastic support to all NATO plans for military expansion in Eastern Europe, appearing as one of the

driving forces for the most hawkish proposals. Thus, Duda has long been demanding the permanent stationing of NATO troops in Poland, a proposal that is set to be discussed at the NATO summit in Warsaw in July 2016.

It also dramatically increased military spending, following the advice of George Friedman that Poland had to become “too much trouble.” The amount of military spending was increased to 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), which is well above the threshold of 2 percent of GDP demanded by NATO. Simultaneously, PiS stepped up efforts to build up a large army of paramilitary formations. The number of such paramilitary troops tripled between spring 2014 and the fall of 2015 to now approximately 80,000.

This compares to the total number of 120,000 soldiers active in the regular Polish Armed Forces. The PiS government is now integrating these paramilitary formations, which maintain close ties to the country’s virulently racist and violent far-right, into the state (see “Polish government intensifies military build-up”). Much like the guerrilla troops employed by the right-wing government in Ukraine in the civil war since 2014, these troops are aimed not only to help in case of war against Russia, but also to be deployed against the working class in case of mass demonstrations or a civil war.

Second, the PiS-government has significantly stepped up its efforts to coordinate policies with the Visegrad group (Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic), increasingly forming a political bloc of opposition toward the policies of Germany within the EU. Politically, one of the main unifying elements has been the opposition to the refugee policy of Berlin.

On a military level, discussions are underway about a possible joint military brigade between Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, named LITPOLUKRBRIG, which, according to some analysts, could become the prototype for a joint military unit. In addition, Poland plans to form a Baltic Sea and Black Sea association, allowing countries that are not yet NATO members, like Ukraine and Moldova, to take part.

It is against this background that the third element of the PiS’s policies, the build-up of a police state, has to be understood. The massive militarization of Polish society and the military build-up are incompatible with the maintenance of basic democratic rights. Immediately following its inauguration, the PiS government has staged a constitutional coup, bringing the security services under its control. The Constitutional Court has been blocked ever since and the country’s public broadcasting services were brought under government control. With a new anti-terrorism bill and a surveillance law, the government has built up the structures of a police state. With this, the PiS government tries to secure itself against impending social and political opposition to its war policies and extreme social inequality.

However, to what extent the Intermarium alliance can and will be realized is still an open question for several reasons. First, the project is fundamentally dependent upon the support of imperialism, above all US imperialism, but there is no consensus in ruling circles in the US over this project. Second, the Eastern European bourgeoisie itself is divided over what policy to pursue vis-à-vis Russia. This goes in particular for Hungary and the Czech Republic, neither of which supports Poland’s aggressive course relating to Russia. Third, the Polish bourgeoisie itself is, as it has always been, bitterly divided over its foreign policy. While fiercely anti-Russian, supporters of the former government party Civic Platform (PO) still support a policy that is oriented toward both Germany and the United States, arguing that the Intermarium project is doomed to fail.

Nevertheless, the militarization and war strategy of the Polish government, which is working on behalf of US imperialism, must be seen as a major danger. The bourgeoisies that emerged out of the Stalinist bureaucracies and their restoration of capitalism 25 years ago are turning the region into a military fulcrum which might develop into a nuclear confrontation between US imperialism and Russia.

As in the 20th century, the Intermarium project is the geopolitical component of a policy that is aimed at mobilizing far-right forces and building up the military against the threat of a socialist revolution by the working class. The working class of Poland and Europe must oppose the bourgeoisie’s strategy of militarism and war by building a socialist anti-war movement and fighting for the unification of the continent on a socialist basis in the form of the United Socialist States of Europe.

Concluded

Notes:

1. Jan Marek Chodakiewicz: Intermarium. The Land Between the Baltic and the Black Seas, 2013: Transaction Publishers, p. 2.

2. Ibid., p. 391.



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